

The Two Worlds of Father Politics in the Republic of Ireland: Swedish versus American Influences

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INTRODUCTION

The social politics of fatherhood have gained increasing attention in comparative family studies. However, welfare state variations in the social politics of fatherhood remain a relatively under researched topic. Early studies on the transformation of men's family relations raised concerns about the declining significance of male-breadwinning fatherhood for children's educational and financial supports in European welfare states (Björnberg & Kollind, 1996). Later analysis of the rights and responsibilities of fatherhood in the United States of America (USA) and selected European countries was based on a comparative typology of 'policy regimes' and fatherhood regimes' (Hobson & Morgan, 2002). Not surprisingly, from a comparative welfare state perspective, early studies of fatherhood were shaped by analysis of national variations in the balance between individual roles or responsibilities and universal or selective entitlements. This examination contributes to emerging knowledge of welfare state variations in the social politics of fatherhood by contrasting Sweden to the USA as influential archetypes. These two nations represent the 'two worlds' of father politics. This comparative analytical framework of a 'two worlds' model contrasts Swedish and American influences on the contemporary politicisation of fatherhood in Ireland through analysis of a succession of government-level reports. These reports published during the decade 1996-2006 dealt with (a) family support, (b) the Constitutional status quo and (c) reform of the One Parent Family (OPF) payment.

From the 1970s to the 1990s Ireland became more open to egalitarian Swedish influences on social questions concerning child welfare and families through an exponential increase of European Union emphasis on gender equality. During the same period, fatherhood was never addressed as a serious concern of Irish social policy. As late as 1998 a parliamentary proposal to establish a Commission on the Status of Men was rejected (Hearn, 2005). However, this investigation uncovered evidence of an important shift. From the late 1990's fatherhood gained greater significance as illustrated in government reports concerning child maintenance, 'vulnerable' fatherhood and the Constitutional status of married and non-married fathers. Further, contemporary Irish social policy perspectives on fatherhood have been much more open to the influence of USA welfare ideologies and father politics, rather than Swedish perspectives. The evidence gathered and reviewed indicates that the contemporary

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politicization of fatherhood has involved a largely residual role for the Irish welfare state. Family support initiatives in Ireland have been selective and targeted in particular at 'vulnerable' fathers without any serious consideration of the Swedish experience, which is distinguished by an "immediate and long-term connection to government policies" aimed at the universal promotion of parental settlements based on 'dual-earner and dual-carer' models of child-rearing (Klinth, 2008, p.20).

Fathers and Social Policy: Comparative Perspectives

Early comparative studies of fatherhood emphasized global perspectives or what might alternatively be termed convergence perspectives on fatherhood shaped in the main by research output from the USA (Russell, 2001). On the other hand, the primary emphasis here is on welfare state variations in the social politics of fatherhood and the divergent influences of American and Swedish perspectives. The concept of the 'two worlds' of father politics presented here builds on Gøsta Esping-Andersen's typology from *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990). This seminal approach to welfare state typology combined political science with political economy to identify three dominant 'models' or 'regimes' of welfare capitalism. Welfare effort was measured using the concept of de-commodification; that is, the extent to which welfare systems compensate for the labour market dependency of paid employees or in welfare terms, 'commodified workers'. Within the *Three Worlds of Welfare Capital* typology 'social democratic' Nordic regimes typified by Sweden and 'conservative' Corporatist regimes typified by Germany emerged as strong states in terms of welfare effort. Hence, rendering residual 'liberal' Anglo-Saxon regimes typified by the USA and the UK as 'welfare laggards' and the most market dependent for workers. The economic-liberal type associated with the USA can also be characterized in terms of primary loyalty to the market. The German conservative model can be characterized in terms of a primary loyalty to the family. Whereas the Swedish social democratic model can be characterized in terms of primary loyalty to citizens through universal welfare state support, which is social policy supports that serve to "liberate" individual women and men from dependency on the family or other social institutions in civil society. Ireland was positioned ambivalently by Esping-Andersen's de-commodification index as a low ranking Anglo-Saxon type system but one with some conservative welfare state features (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Consequential research dedicated exclusively to analysis of 'Ireland's place in the worlds of welfare capitalism' claimed that the Irish welfare state, as a semi-peripheral ex colony with a high reliance on agriculture, tended to be under-analysed or misrepresented within comparative analysis only to fit awkwardly into industrialized European models such as Esping-Andersen's (1990) *Three Worlds of Welfare Capital* (Cousins, 1997). This problem of positioning Ireland within existing classifications was reconciled more recently by the proposition that the international significance of the Irish welfare system "rests mainly in its counterpoint value" as a mixed economy of welfare with a highly centralised social security system and a powerful "Catholic factor in welfare development" and welfare delivery (Peillon, 2001, p. 2). By way of contrast, the position of Ireland within existing welfare models or even within the 'two worlds' of father politics proposed is not a concern of this examination. Rather the focus is to identify distinct Swedish and American influences on perceptions of fatherhood within Irish welfare state development.

The 'two worlds' model of father politics presented here differs from Esping-Andersen's welfare capitalism model by focusing not on the treatment of men as de-commodified workers but rather on their conceptual and practical treatment as fathers in social policies. In the Swedish case, fathers and mothers are both highly de-commodified through features of parental leave insurance that provide for substantial leave entitlements. A total of 480 benefit days is paid per child. Sixty of these days are reserved for each parent. In 1995 the first non-transferable parental leave month was introduced. In 2002, another month was added. For fathers these two months are commonly referred to as the 'daddy months.' Swedish family policy encourages fathers to participate in child-rearing regardless of marital status and parents with joint custody are entitled to 240 days of parental benefit each (Försäkringskassan, n.d.). This all-inclusive approach to parenting pre-dates contemporary interest in active fatherhood and can be traced back to the foundations of Swedish family policy in the 1930s, which, promoted universal child well-being over the promotion of any particular family type (Arve-Pares, 1995). A second stage in the development of Swedish family policy dedicated to the reconciliation of work and family life took off during the 1960s. As a result, Swedish social policies from the 1970s to the present day have given exponential prominence to the role of fatherhood in the design of parental leave insurance schemes (Bergman & Hobson, 2004). Despite this exponential emphasis on the role of the father in Swedish social policy, contemporary sociological analysis spanning five continents also presents Sweden as a pioneer of gender equality and the decline of patriarchy (Therborn, 2004). Therborn re-defined patriarchy as 'the rule of the father' and traced the origins of what he termed the long 'de-patriarchalisation' process back to the establishment of the Scandinavian Law Commission in 1905 and the consequential marriage law reforms, which were established by Sweden in 1915. Similar marriage law reforms were introduced to Norway (1909), Denmark (1922) and Finland (1929).

Therefore, Swedish social policy places a practical emphasis on the improvement of child-rearing opportunities for fathers regardless of marital status within a historical structural context. That context emphasised equality in the gender relations of paid work and parenting plus the dismantling of patriarchy within families. By contrast, fathers in the USA remain highly commodified as male-breadwinners with only residual recognition of their social citizenship entitlements as parents. In Hobson and Morgan's (2002) typology of 'policy regimes and fatherhood regimes' the USA was classified as less family policy orientated than Britain making it an extreme or outlier example of market reliance. They argued that: the family plays a more central role in British social policy than in the USA where market reliance is stronger and where both women and men are expected to support themselves through paid employment (p. 13).

American research, from a comparative psychological perspective, has placed a recurring emphasise on the significance of father salience to child development and socialisation (Lamb, 1976, 2004). However, social policy in the USA offers little support to working fathers apart from the promotion of selective community based father intervention programmes (Mincy & Pound, 2002). Baskerville (2002), a USA political scientist, whose article *The Politics of Fatherhood* presented the line of reasoning that fatherhood had rapidly become "the number one social policy issue in America... Yet despite its salience in public policy debates and within psychology, sociology, and law, fatherhood has received little attention from political scientists" (p. 695). Baskerville's core argument was that prevailing depictions in the

USA of a “crisis of fatherhood” should be understood much less as a sociological or psychological problem and much more as a political problem. At the same time Hobson and Morgan (2002) were raising concerns from a comparative gender perspective that policy makers had depicted a “crisis of fatherhood” which had somehow become “woven into the warp of the crisis in welfare states” (p. 2).

Hobson and Morgan (2002) coined the term ‘the social politics of fatherhood’ to denote the importance of “policy legacies, political constellations and mobilized constituencies” for comparative analysis (p. 3). Ellingsaeter and Leira (2006, p. 4) in *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia: Gender Relations and Welfare States* broadly define the term ‘politics’ in relation to parenting which provided a framework for the investigation. This conveys an understanding that in contemporary welfare states fatherhood is increasingly attracting public interest and concern, and projected as a matter for political intervention and investment. This broader view of fatherhood requires incorporating into the practice of characterising welfare states in terms of models or typologies that was referred to by Abrahamson (1999) as the ‘welfare modelling business.’ Abrahamson and Ellingsaeter and Leira (2006) focus on the “Scandinavian model” of welfare, which includes analysis of Sweden, Norway and Denmark. On the other hand Eydal (2006, p.1) made a study of “policies and caring fathers in the Nordic countries,” which included analysis of the three Scandinavian countries plus Finland and Iceland. Among these nations, Sweden is generally represented as the exemplar social democratic and universal welfare state in studies of both the ‘Scandinavian’ and ‘Nordic’ models of welfare. This investigation can therefore be characterised as a contribution to ‘welfare state models of fatherhood’ by placing a particular emphasis on welfare state variations in the social politics of fatherhood and on Swedish and American influences. The next section expands on some of the main differences between welfare state approaches in the USA and Sweden.

THE ‘TWO WORLDS’ OF FATHER POLITICS

Swedish Social Policy: Welfare State Idealisation of Fathers

The gender relations of paid work, parenting and the well-being of children are prominent issues in Swedish social policy and were presented by Haas, Allard & Hwang (2002, p. 321) as the core concerns of the Swedish welfare state. From the 1970s, Swedish social policy promoted greater opportunities for father involvement in child-rearing through social insurance based provision of parental leave (Bergman & Hobson, 2002). As further encouragement from 1995, one month or 30 days of parental leave was designated for each parent and became non-transferable. This provision was extended in 2002, when a second month became non-transferable. These non-transferable features of parental leave insurance, for fathers, popularly termed the ‘daddy months’, were positioned as a significant feature of a longer-term Swedish welfare state campaign to promote a ‘dual-earner and dual-carer’ model or ‘half-each’ ideal of parenting regardless of marital status (Klinth, 2008). The archetypal significance of Swedish support for paternal involvement in child-rearing was emphasised in a recent review from Uppsala University of 24 longitudinal studies of fathers’ salience to child-development outcomes (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2007). They observed that “Paid parental leave for father’s...and employers supportive of men staying at home with their infants and sick children are still but a dream in most countries.” (p. 154).

This recent ethological or comparative psychological emphasis on father salience to child development at the level of the family is therefore strongly tempered in the above quote by a matching emphasis on structural support within the Swedish welfare economy. The significance of this dual Swedish emphasis on agency at the individual level and structural support within the welfare economy was emphasised for comparative analysis of European family policies by Kaufman (2002). Kaufman observed that "the family in Sweden is understood more as an agency of society than as a realm of privacy...and the husbands assumption of family responsibilities is accorded special importance" (p. 470). Swedish social policy places a conventional emphasis on a holistic relationship between social structure at the level of the welfare economy and individual agency at the level of paternal involvement in family life, while Swedish family policy does not promote complementary or strongly gender differentiated parental roles. On the contrary, early research into men's parenting roles in low to middle-income neighbourhoods in Stockholm and Goteberg of 128 families claimed that gender impacted positively on children when parents acted as if gender does not matter (Sanqvist 1996). The Stockholm-Goteberg sample illustrated a direct challenge to the significance of complementary parenting roles and suggested that male and female parental identities were gender differentiated to a lesser extent in Sweden than in the USA. Sanqvist (1996, p. 147) identified the mid-1980s as an era when men first became "a research topic" illustrated by the Swedish Ministry of Labour's establishment of 'The Man Group' to study men's roles including their roles as fathers. The period from the mid 1970s to the early 1990s thus represented a social policy departure from traditional parenting roles. A newspaper campaign in the mid 1950s Sweden, which begged the question "Can a Real Man Push a Pram" served to illustrate the origins of this Swedish 'liberation' from traditional complementary parenting roles (p. 145).

American Social Policy: Father Salience to Child Development

Comparative psychological or ethological perspectives of father salience to child development and sociological concerns with father absence have gained remarkable influence within American social policy (Baskerville, 2002). The term ethology is applied to scientific study of individual and international differences in character or behavior. Subsequently a recurring research question that has preoccupied academics and policy makers in the USA is "whether father involvement, in any or all of its forms is associated with child well-being" (Greene, Halle, Menestrel, Moore & West, 2001, p.2). The origins of ethological and behavioural preoccupations with father involvement can be traced back to Lamb's seminal article on 'Fathers: forgotten contributors to child development' (1975). A vast canon of research has since developed that presents a dual challenge: firstly to attachment-theory representations associated with Bowlby (1969) of mothers as the primary carer and secondly to functionalist portrayals of fathers as instrumental-breadwinners by Parsons and Bales (1955). These trends in American research are considered an 'ethological quest' to substantiate a salient role for fathers that goes beyond a legacy of 'instrumental' breadwinning and into the 'expressive' realm of parenting traditionally associated with mother-infant attachments.

More contemporary sociological research has given prominence to the issue of father absence as an explanatory feature of child-poverty in mother headed households in the USA (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Prominent social commentators on 'family decline' including Popenoe (1996) and Blankenhorn (1995) characterise 'fatherlessness' as a malign aspect of

social reproduction in the USA. However, critics argue that conservative claims concerning family decline and fatherlessness in the USA have tended to conflate the negative consequences of divorce and separation on child socialisation with the experiences of father absence (Stacey, 1993). In addition, while on the one hand feminist authors such as Coontz (1992, 2005) have received national and international acclaim, on the other hand Stacey's argument that liberal and feminist perspectives were largely ghettoized in American family policy debates remains deeply relevant to the American model of father politics (1999, p. 194).

Contemporary father politics in the USA have combined the promotion of community-based intervention programmes for 'vulnerable' fathers with the punitive enforcement of child maintenance enforcement through the courts (Orloff & Monson, 2002). A recurring preoccupation with father absence and the legitimacy of lone-mother welfare entitlements in the USA was blamed in a study of 'men without children' on the influence of underclass theories and the persistent power of conservative family and welfare ideologies (Ackerlof, 1998). Time-limited welfare arrangements such as the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programme introduced under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity and Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) were designed in the words of President Bill Clinton to "end welfare as we know it" (Handler, 2000, p.117). However, it is understood with some controversy that social policy reforms have "made it harder for a single woman to raise a child" in the USA (McLanahan, 2009, p.128). Therefore, instead of responding positively to demographic change and the changing role of fatherhood, it has been claimed that contemporary American welfare reforms have turned lone-mothers, and by association non-resident fathers, into "second class social citizens" (Mettler, 2000). A Janus-faced understanding of American fatherhood has subsequently prevailed based on a long-standing dualism of 'good dads' in 'intact' families and 'bad dads' who fail to measure up to their moral and financial obligations (Furstenberg, 1988; Pleck, 2004).

Differences between Swedish and US Perspectives

Figure 1 contains the different methodological and substantive principles for each of the 'two worlds' of father politics. The differences noted in Figure 1 summarize significant aspects in a comparison between the USA and Sweden and why they should be considered as influential archetypes of father politics. The aspects noted for the USA reflect an ongoing trajectory of an economic-liberal and fundamentally neo-patriarchal discourse of father politics as set against a Swedish gender equality discourse of father politics aimed at dismantling patriarchal power in the dynamics of family life.

Ireland: Empirical Research Focus

What follows are the results from documentary analysis of Irish government-level social policy reports spanning the decade 1996-2006. Documentary investigation has always provided a rich vein for social science research and the distinction between 'documents' and 'contemporary literature' became an established orthodoxy within the classic sociological tradition (Scott, 1990, p.1). Documents are written to support the actions of individuals, organisations and communities from the realm of the individual to the realm of the nation state. Contemporary literature is written sources such as newspapers, sermons and conceptual literature, which are contemporary to the period or events under review. Examples from

Figure 1.

Methodological and Substantive Principles of the 'Two Worlds' of Father Politics

US Father Politics	Swedish Father Politics
Clinical and psychological Perspectives	Social policy Perspectives
Positivist perspectives on agency	Social constructionist perspectives on social structure
Measurement of father salience	Measurement of paternal leave take-up
Social commentary on dead-beat dads	Media campaigns promoting caring fathers
Social pathology blamed on 'Fatherless America'	Low take-up of paternal leave blamed on employers
Bottom-up fathers rights movements	Grass-roots feminism & father think-tanks
Normative concern with new father ideologies and the 'marriage benefit'	Normative concern with idealized egalitarian fathers and family agency/diversity
Family diversity discouraged by social policy	Marriage not-privileged by social policy
Social pathology of lone parent families	Normalisation of Lone parent families
Emphasis on child maintenance enforcement	Emphasis on public child care entitlement
Strong Male-Breadwinner Culture based on dual-earner/ primary-carer marriage	Weak Male-Breadwinner Culture based on dual-earner-dual-carer family model
New politics of authoritarian-nurturing fatherhood, private patriarchy, complementary parenting and marriage	New politics of idealized egalitarian fatherhood, state feminism, gender equal parenting and family diversity

contemporary literature, in this case primarily from print-media commentary, are for illustrative purposes only. The focus will be on the results of a systematic investigation of the 'characteristic' social policy 'documents' published under the auspices the Irish Government.

Irish Government documents relating to three interlocking themes were chosen for analysis based on their relevance to father politics, which was often implicit rather than explicit. First, documents from the domain of Irish family support debates were chosen and in this instance, the 'characteristic' document identified was *The Commission on the Family: Final Report to the Minister for Social Community and Family Affairs — Strengthening Families for Life* (Government of Ireland, 1998). Second, documents from normative debates concerning the amendment of the 1937 Constitution of Ireland-Bunreacht na hEireann (www.constitution.ie) were chosen and in this instance the 'characteristic' documents identified were *The Report of the Constitutional Review Group* (Government of Ireland, 1996) and the *All-Party Oireachtas {parliamentary} Committee on the Constitution Progress Report on the Family* (Government of Ireland, 2006a). Third, documents from debates concerning social welfare reform were chosen specifically to examine the implementation of child-maintenance recovery strategies towards non-resident fathers and the introduction of USA-style 'time-limits' for

lone-mothers. In this instance the 'characteristic' documents were identified as the *Review of the One Family Parent Payment: Programme Evaluation Report No7 The Department of Social, Community and Family* (Government of Ireland, 2000), the *Report of the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (SOGSI): Analysis of Obstacles to Employment for Lone Parents* (Government of Ireland, 2006b) and the *Department of Social and Family Affairs Report of Income Supports for Lone Parents and Parents on Low Income: Proposals for Discussion* (Government of Ireland (2006c).

Patriarchal Familism versus De-Familisation and Gender Equality

The Irish historical starting place consists of patriarchal familism and male breadwinning conventions. Both are deeply embedded in Roman Catholic cultural traditions. Roman Catholic traditions are reflected in the 1937 Irish Constitution (cited in Government of Ireland, 2006a, p. 53), where in accordance with Article 41:

1. The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.
2. The State, therefore guarantees to protect the family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the state.

In addition, Article 41.3 reads as follows:

The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of marriage, on which the family is founded, and to protect it against attack.

From 1973 onward, European Union membership, welfare state expansion, and social modernization rendered Ireland increasingly open to more secular and egalitarian Swedish social policy influences. These influences were most prominent in child welfare debates, which promoted the concept of 'defamilisation.' Specifically the constitutional status of the child became politicized in debates about children's rights and child protection through opposition to the concept of 'familisation.' Richardson defined 'familisation' as "the fusion of childhood into the institution of the family defining children only as an extension of their parents" (Richardson 1999, p. 188). Opposition to the concept of 'familisation' provided egalitarian-individualist perspectives who opposed the Roman Catholic bias of the 1937 Constitution with a unifying set of 'defamilisation' arguments throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Subsequently in 1996, the Constitutional Review Group (CRG) argued that Articles 41 and 42 of the Irish Constitution "were heavily influenced by Roman Catholic teaching and Papal encyclicals." (p.319). The Government established the CRG with elder statesman Dr TK Whitaker as chairman in April 1995. The fifteen members of the CRG were selected from different backgrounds including administration, economics, education, law, political science, and sociology, with lawyers predominating. The *Report of the Constitution Review Group* was published in July 1996, comprising within its 700 pages the most thorough normative and vocational analysis of the Constitution ever made.

The CRG sought to neutralize the influence of Catholic social teaching in the Constitution. The CRG 1996 report published in the same year as the introduction of the Family Law (Divorce) Act 1996 presented a case for normative-vocationalist reform of the Constitutional status quo. The CRG argued that Articles 41 and 42 of the Constitution “were clearly drafted with one family in mind, namely, the family based on marriage.” (p. 319). The CRG in their report raised long-standing concerns that Articles 41 and 42 “had distorted attitudes to non-marital families.” The CRG reflected a broader secular perspective when it recommended “social changes call for amendments in the Constitution.” The CRG recommended that all families including those outside marriage should receive Constitutional recognition and protection in respect to their family life (p.332). The CRG recommended specifically that all family rights, including those of unmarried mothers or fathers and children born of unmarried parents, should be placed in Article 41 (p.336).

Two years later the *Final Report of the Commission on the Family—Strengthening Families for Life* raised questions about the social status of marriage and argued rather more conservatively. The report stated that “marriage as a visible institution, underpinned by contractual obligations, presents clear advantages from a public policy perspective in promoting security and stability in family life and in providing a continuity in society” (Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 183). The report construed concerns about “the changes taking place in the institution of marriage” in terms of “marital breakdown, the fall in the marriage rate and in the birth rate and the continuous rise in births outside marriage” (p. 182). As shown in Table 1 family categories from 1996 to 2006 reported by the Irish Census of Population data illustrates the extent of family change in the Republic of Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2006) The number of cohabiting couples with children nearly quadrupled between 1996 and 2002. Cohabiting couples with children (43,093) and lone-mother families (144,847) totalled 187,940 families. According to the Constitutional and legislative status quo, biological fathers would not be recognized as having any rights concerning their children.

Table 1.

Family Categories based on Census of Population Data 1996, 2002, and 2006

<i>Family Categories</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>Increase</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>Increase</i>	<i>%</i>
Husband and wife without children	54,854	184,950	30,096	19%	217,374	32,424	18%
Cohabiting couple without children	18,640	47,907	29,267	157%	76,045	28,138	59%
Married couple with children	491,567	508,035	16,468	4%	490,592	-17,443	-3%
Cohabiting couple with children	12,658	29,709	17,051	134%	43,093	13,384	45%
Lone mother with children	108,282	130,364	22,082	20%	144,847	14,483	11%
Lone father with children	20,834	23,499	2,665	13%	24,933	1,434	6%

The occlusion of biological fathers from families outside marriage was confirmed in 1966 (IR 567) by the Supreme Court in *The State (Nicolaou) v An Bord Uchtala* where it was judged that "a natural father is not a member of a family within Article 41" and furthermore "a natural father is not a parent within Article 42" (Cited by the Government of Ireland 2006a, p. 96). According to this judgement, biological fathers outside marriage have "no personal right in relation to his child which the State is bound to protect under Article 40.3." Mr Justice Walsh of the Supreme Court stated the basis for the judgement:

It has not been shown to the satisfaction of this court that the father of an illegitimate child has any natural right, as distinct from legal rights, to either the custody, or society of that child and the Court has not been satisfied that any such right has ever been recognised as part of the natural law. . . . (2006a, p. 96)

It was assumed under Irish natural law that fathers outside marriage have waived any right to a formal parental relationship. In the same ruling, *The State (Nicolaou) v An Bord Uchtala*, a birth mother was understood by natural law to have a right in relation to her child that was protected under Article 40.3 of the Irish Constitution. Thus, a lone-mother or a cohabiting mother does not waive her right to a parental relationship by giving birth outside marriage in the same way that a biological father does (McKeown, 2001). Despite expressing grave reservations about the absence of rights for natural fathers under the Constitution, both the CRG and the *Strengthening Families for Life* report recommended no specific amendments concerning natural fathers' rights. Two reasons cited were it would include fatherhood resulting from rape, incest, or sperm donor-ship and it would include fathers who had no stable relationship with the mother (Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 326).

In many respects, the 1998 *Strengthening Families for Life* report can be read as a socially cautious response to (a) the Family Law (Divorce) Act 1996, (b) the final report of the Constitutional Review Group (Government of Ireland 1996), and (c) an increase in births outside marriage. *Strengthening Families for Life* contained a chapter entitled 'Fathers: Irish experience in an international context' authored by three prominent father's rights advocates which deviated explicitly from what it termed the "feminist/fairness perspective" in favour of American psychological or 'development' perspectives (McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney 1998a, pp. 404-460). The 'developmental perspective' represented a conceptual departure from the feminist paradigm of gender equality associated with the 1970s.

The feminist or 'fairness perspective' challenged specifically in *Strengthening Families for Life* had been adopted by Kiely (1995) for a study of urban fathers (n=513). A paper delivered to the 1993 Copenhagen conference on 'Fathers in Families of Tomorrow' by de-Singly (1993) methodologically informed Kiely's study. McKeown, Ferguson and Rooney (1998b, p. 115) went on subsequently to argue that "paternal participation need not be a personal sacrifice of patriarchal privilege for the sake of social justice" instead it could be viewed "as an important step in one's personal growth." The *Strengthening Families for Life* report ushered in an era of government funded reports under the newly established Family Research Programme and the Springboard Family Support Initiative. These government backed studies included reports on the significance of fathers to family support policies (Ferguson & Hogan, 2004; McKeown, 2001), reports on social policy and family well-being (McKeown, Pratschke & Haase, 2003), comparative studies of European family policies (Daly and Clavero, 2002)

and the experiences of socially disadvantaged young men including young fathers (Cleary, Corbett, Galvin & Wall, 2004). A subsequent review of the first generation of studies carried out under the Family Research Programme illustrated that the personality characteristics of parents had emerged as “important determinants” of family well-being (Cousins, 2006).

Overall, *The Final Report of the Commission on the Family—Strengthening Families for Life* ushered in an era of exponential growth for family support research in Ireland. This included a significant discussion on the role of fatherhood, albeit in a selective context of targeted social intervention for vulnerable fathers. Notwithstanding the claim by Cleary (2004, p. 24) that “the absence of a father is not inherently problematic for the male child,” in general, father orientated research carried out in the period following the *Final Report of the Commission of the Family* (Government of Ireland, 1998) tended to be more open to the influences of American research experiences. Irish government-backed reports on fatherhood engaged significantly with American research to advance a socio-psychological and behavioural approach to social exclusion and social disadvantage in Irish family policy (Ferguson & Hogan, 2004; McKeown, 2001; McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney Ferguson 1998a.). American research influences have tended to serve the ongoing development in Ireland of a selective emphasis on agency and individual behaviour within disadvantaged families. Nearly a decade later, the prevailing influence of conservative family and welfare ideologies from the USA was made apparent in the *The All-Party Oireachtas (parliamentary) Committee on the Constitution (APOCC) 10th Progress Report on the Family* (2006a).

Research studies on marriage and fatherhood from the USA were cited extensively in the public submissions to the APOCC report including *Why Marriage Matters* from the Center of the American Experiment (Institute of American Values, 2005). The APOCC (2006a) report discussed *Why Marriage Matters* in some detail using its findings to build a case for its own conclusions about the importance of the traditional family based on marriage. *Why Marriage Matters* provided as stated in the APOCC report:

Findings from the social sciences on an important range of marriage issues arising from American experience, findings on the relationship of marriage to family, economics, physical health and longevity, mental health and emotional well-being and crime and domestic violence. Its fundamental conclusion is that marriage is an important social good, associated with an impressively broad array of positive outcomes for children and adults alike (p. 62).

The European Life Network (ELN) submitted the book *Why Marriage Matters* to the 10th All-Party Oireachtas Committee. The ELN, declared, “current social scientific research in the United States confirms the importance of marriage and the family” (p. A61). In a similar approach the Focus on the Family Ireland (FFI) group referred to US research referentially as a “powerful body of scientific inquiry” and in terms of a “huge amounts of research” or “compelling research” with the additional caveat that “there are many more studies and experts we could quote” (p. A81). The impression given was that the sheer volume of research from the USA advocating the benefits of marriage to social reproduction and stability was testimony not only to its legitimacy but also to its universal significance and pre-eminence. The sheer scale of submissions citing USA research provoked the 10th All-Party Oireachtas

Committee to caution its audience that it “did not receive comparable wide-ranging research on European experience” (p. 62). This strong bias in public submissions towards social science research from the USA in Irish Constitutional debates concerning families was highlighted and to some extent cautioned against by the 10th All-Party Oireachtas Committee. American sociological and ethological orientated understandings of the salience of fatherhood to child development played an influential role in the deliberations of the 10th All-Party Oireachtas Committee and the following quote from the Focus on the Family in Ireland (FFI) included in the report was characteristic of the public submissions.

Sara McLanahan of Princeton University, a leading scholar on how family formation affects child well-being, finds in numerous studies that children raised with only one biological parent are about twice as likely to drop out of school as children being raised with two biological parents (2006a, p. A82).

The underlying message of the mainly conservative submissions to the All-Party Oireachtas Committee was characterized by the European Life Network (ELN) who contended that “current social scientific research in the United States confirms the importance of marriage and the family” with the warning that “giving non-marital relationships the same status as marriage does not expand the definition of marriage; it destroys it” (p. A61). The influence of American conservative and patriarchal understandings of fatherhood was made particularly apparent when the FFI favorably cited the viewpoint of J. Q. Wilson (2002, p.16) that “by family I mean a lasting, socially enforced legislation between a man and a woman that authorizes sexual congress and the supervision of children.” These conservative ideologies notwithstanding the APOCC report did go so far as to recommend legislative and constitutional recognition to birth fathers outside marriage as a birthright for children.

Irish welfare reformers in their debates did not so readily accept the immediate relevance of the conservative and patriarchal welfare ideologies from the USA. For example, a research survey on the preferences and viewpoints of lone mothers published in full as an appendix to the *Review of the One Family Parent Payment: Programme Evaluation Report No7-The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs* (Government Of Ireland, 2000) declared that “young single mothers would prefer not to accept maintenance...[because]...if the father paid maintenance this would undermine their ability to control access and protect their children (as they saw it)” (Russell & Corcoran, 2000, p. 17). The policy proposal to enforce child maintenance payments through the courts came under criticism from McKeown (2001b, p.28) in Irish administrative debates. In addition, comparative analysis of welfare to work programmes in the *Review of the One Family Parent Payment* report argued that social welfare ‘time-limits’ for lone parents were introduced under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programme following a ‘hardening of attitudes’ toward lone mothers in the USA and that similar developments in Ireland “were neither practical nor acceptable at this point in time” (Government of Ireland, 2000, p. 47-83). However, just over half a decade later, the *Report of the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (SOGSI): Analysis of Obstacles to Employment for Lone Parents* recommended the introduction of similar US-style time limits (Government of Ireland 2006b).

Equally significant and despite the protestations of lone-mother welfare recipients, Maintenance Recovery Programmes were introduced to Ireland on the recommendation of

the aforementioned *Review of the One Family Parent Payment* report (Government of Ireland, 2000). Consequently in April 2004, the Department of Social and Family Affairs Maintenance Recovery Section won what a prominent Irish Times journalist labeled as 'a landmark ruling' against four absent fathers who had failed to comply with a 'Liable Relative Determination Order' (Holland, 2004). The court cases were heralded in the *Sunday Independent* newspaper for being the first child-maintenance cases of their kind to be held in Ireland (O'Keefe, 2004). The O'Keefe article welcomed the ruling as a punitive fiscal judgment that hurt errant fathers by hitting them squarely in their pockets. The article went on to explain that the Maintenance Recovery section of the Department of Social and Family Affairs was expected to recover the not inconsiderable sum of €14 million from liable fathers (O'Keefe, 2004).

The pursuit of maintenance recovery from 'Liable Relatives' by the Department of Social and Family Affairs coupled with social welfare reform debates gave non-resident fathers, and even more so, lone-mother families a heightened profile in print media reporting. These debates were summarised in a newspaper article by prominent academic Dr. Ed Walsh who informed readers that in Britain and the United States public policies had been reviewed to ensure that the formation of lone-parent families was not encouraged (2005). In addition, the role of fathers was highlighted implicitly when the Walsh article drew on national and international studies to inform readers that children who were cared for by both biological parents were less likely to be school drop outs, to be abused or to be involved in violent crime. Conservative tendencies to blame feminism and lone-mother welfare entitlement for father absence was castigated by Anne Carey (2007), a feature columnist with the Irish Sunday Times newspaper, who argued that the depiction of an Irish feminist-dominated dystopia was a result of wholesale societal amnesia regarding the previous ill-treatment of lone mother families by Irish patriarchal familism. She wrote:

How many awful films, books, and documentaries have we seen about Magdalene Laundries and babies sold for adoption? How many pregnant women were packed off in disgrace and never heard from again? Why was the state obliged to pay deserted wives and single mothers an allowance in the first place? The fathers weren't exactly banging down the doors and rescuing the women from the laundries, were they? Shared custody is a relatively new concept for a nation that in one generation went from locking up pregnant women to supporting them financially -in both cases because the fathers weren't interested. (p. 14)

Controversial movies such as 'The Magdalene Sisters' (2002), based on the Magdalene Laundries mentioned above, portrayed the cruel institutional treatment of unwed pregnant teenagers and older women who were segregated and put to work in convent laundries. Their crime was to have sexually transgressed Irish patriarchal codes of female behaviour in the 1960s. At the time, pregnancy outside marriage was conventionally sermonized to be the most serious female transgression of these patriarchal codes of behaviour (Ferriter, 2009).

Ireland in Comparison

Today births outside marriage in Ireland, as elsewhere in the OECD or Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development member states, have become a widespread

phenomenon. Table 2, using data from 1980 to 2005, charts the increase in births outside marriage in 12 selected countries.

Table 2.

Births to Unmarried Women as a Percent of All Live Births in 12 Selected Countries

Country	1980	1990	1995	2000	2004	2005
United States	18.4	28.0	32.2	33.2	35.8	36.8
Canada	12.8	24.4	27.6	28.3	25.6	
Japan	0.8	1.1	1.2	1.6	2.0	
Denmark	33.2	46.4	46.5	44.6	45.4	45.7
France	11.4	30.1	37.6	43.6	47.4	48.4
Germany	-	15.1	16.1	23.4	27.9	29.2
Ireland	5.9	14.6	22.3	31.5	31.9	32.0
Italy	4.3	6.5	8.1	9.7		13.8
Netherlands	4.1	11.4	15.5	24.9	32.5	34.9
Spain	3.9	9.6	11.1	17.7	25.1	26.8
Sweden	39.7	47.0	53.0	55.3	55.4	55.4
United Kingdom	11.5	27.9	33.5	39.5	42.3	42.9

Source: US Federal Interagency on Child and Family Statistics Data Tables.

The comparative data in Table 2 illustrate that births outside marriage have become an almost universal phenomenon either rivalling births within marriage or surpassing them as in the case of Sweden. From comparative data on the percentage of all working age parents with dependent children who are lone parents it is clear, that notwithstanding welfare state variations, lone motherhood has also become a universally widespread phenomenon (Bradshaw & Finch, 2002). A prevailing conundrum of the behavioural sciences in the USA is that social scientists have failed yet to adequately explain the apparent exodus of men from the family life of their biological off-spring, which these global trends signify (Lamb & Tamis Lemonda, 2004:16). The 'human carnage of fatherless-ness' was a term coined in the USA by Popenoe to denote 'declining child well-being, rising juvenile violent crime, the rise of eating disorders and unipolar depression among girls, a tripling of teenage suicide, and an increase from 15% to 22% in child poverty rates' (Popenoe, 1996, p.54). A basic principle of this type of American sociological view is that fatherlessness has led to "a startling increase in child poverty" in the USA where the "proliferation of mother-headed families now constitutes something of national economic emergency" (Popenoe, 1996, p. 54). On the other hand, in an international study of contemporary social policies related to family types and child well-being outcomes, Kamerman, Neuman, Walford and Brooks-Gunn (2003) made the simple but cogent claim that:

"Contrary to common belief, disparities in the percentage of single parent families do not explain the cross country variations in child poverty and disadvantage already noted. The varied results depend on how countries treat these families in their policies." (p. 19)

In Ireland, the most recent trends have been to follow American influences and to forge stronger links between social welfare policies and punitive legal maintenance enforcement (Government of Ireland, 1998). These influences are illustrated in the following quote from the Irish Sunday Times (Bushe, 2004):

The huge bill for supporting lone parents is now a political issue in America. In many states, “deadbeat” dads who refuse to pay up become non-persons. They are not allowed to apply for any public work or contracts, and all state permits such as driving licenses are automatically refused. (p. 4).

In addition, the Report of the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (SOGSI) (Government of Ireland 2006b) carried out by the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and the Report of Income Supports for Lone Parents and Parents on Low Income: Proposals for Discussion by the Department of Social and Family Affairs (Government of Ireland 2006c) both recommended the introduction of USA-style ‘time limits’ for lone mothers in respect of welfare entitlement. This may yet involve the abolition of the One Parent Family Payment and a transfer onto a proposed temporary ‘Parental Allowance’ until a child reaches 7 years of age. Parental status under the social welfare code would all but disappear when the child turns seven under a new ‘welfare to work’ oriented benefit called the ‘Participation Income’ (National Economic and Social Council, 2005, p. 219). This would involve a complete U-turn in ways of thinking about social protection in Irish social policy from a situation where comparative analysis showed that Ireland had the least time limits and most generous duration for lone-mother welfare entitlement among OECD countries (Eardley 1996).

These neo-liberal trends are not at variance with the future trajectory of the Irish welfare state as envisaged by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), who have put forward “the contention that welfare reform in Ireland should primarily be about increased targeting and travelling further down the road of a residual welfare state.” (p. 150). In terms of the social politics of fatherhood, this residual proposition by the NESC would imply an accelerated trajectory towards American *laissez-faire* approaches. Such a trajectory is in keeping with a behavioural emphasis within Irish social policy on individual father responsibility or agency combined with a fiscal emphasis on child-maintenance enforcement. Greater opportunities for father involvement in child-rearing through the provision of parental leave regimes and joint child custody arrangements, along the lines of the Swedish social democratic model of fatherhood, have been bypassed in Ireland. What hold favour are the American conservative neo-patriarchal influences and neo-liberal welfare ideologies.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

By contrast, with earlier depictions of global understandings of fatherhood by Russell (2001), results of this investigation found that Sweden and the USA represent two divergent worlds of father politics. How Swedish and American father politics differ in terms of welfare ideologies has been emphasized. The almost exclusive significance of psychological and sociological perspectives within American father politics was highlighted. The former perspective is preoccupied mainly by questions concerning the salience of fatherhood to child development and the latter concerned with social pathologies of father absence in mother-headed households. These American psychological and sociological perspectives on fatherhood provide an exaggerated emphasis on human agency that generally fails to address the limitations and often punitive nature of neo-liberal approaches to family welfare. On the other hand, Swedish understandings of father politics are based mainly on gender equality perspectives. Swedish gender equality perspectives on fatherhood provide an emphasis on social structure and on the universal role of social policy in reforming the gender relations of labour markets and dismantling patriarchal familism.

A major difference between American and Swedish understandings of fatherhood is that in the latter case marriage is not privileged by the welfare state. On the other hand, parenting is universally supported through the decommodification of mothers and fathers from paid employment by egalitarian parental leave entitlements. To summarise, American understandings of fatherhood revolve around an exaggerated emphasis on the significance of complementary parenting within marriage, while Swedish understandings revolve around an emphasis on gender equal or neutral parenting and extensive periods of parental leave. In the Swedish case a 'half-each' approach to paid work and parenting by fathers is promoted as a patriotic duty not only to children but also as an egalitarian duty to facilitate the career development opportunities of the birth-mother (Klinth, 2008). This patriotic duty for Swedish fathers to raise children equally alongside working mothers transcends marriage, cohabitation and non-residency and applies to all natural fathers regardless of marital status. The long-term politicisation of fatherhood in Sweden involving a first stage in the 1970s and the second stage in the 1990s has been a social policy success story in terms of gender equality outcomes and improved father involvement in child-rearing so much so that Swedish society now enjoys a situation where there are "fewer and fewer fathers who lose contact with their children after divorce" (Hobson & Morgan, (2002, p. 4). Indeed the Swedish approach to father politics and parental leave provision may offer a classic case study of what McConnell (2010) characterizes as a 'policy success.'

In contrast, according to Irish Constitutional status quo perspectives, fathers outside marriage, even in the contemporary era, are understood by volition to have embarked on a 'flight from fatherhood' and waived their rights to a formal father-child relationship. Ironically, the 10th *All Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution (APOCC) Report on the Family* (2006a, pp 62 & 121) reinforced the Constitutional status quo not so much on the basis of Roman Catholic social teaching but rather on the basis of American patriarchal-familism perspectives concerning the benefits of marriage to individual well-being and social stability. Basically, in the contemporary era American social science beliefs about the salience of natural fatherhood to child development and the benefits of marriage to social reproduction have provided Irish patriarchal-familism with a unifying set of arguments in favour of the Constitutional status quo. By failing to extend the definition of the family based on marriage or to recognise formally biological fatherhood outside marriage, the 10th APOCC report 'pushed' claims to formal fatherhood further beyond the reach of many non-resident and cohabiting fathers. McGinnity and Russell (2008) have recently shown that a traditional patriarchal-familist emphasis on male-breadwinning and gender differentiated parenting roles already serves to keep many fathers working long hours and on the periphery of child-rearing and housework in most families. This suggests that non-residency through divorce and separation serves only to strengthen an already peripheral 'instrumental' role in parenting and the interior world of the family for many Irish fathers.

A conceptual shift towards USA psychology orientated developmental perspectives within Irish father politics and family welfare debates was shown to have eclipsed earlier trends towards welfare state expansion and Scandinavian understandings of child welfare and child protection based on the concept of defamilisation. In addition, the Irish adoption of these USA psychology orientated developmental perspectives was seen to eclipse earlier conceptual understandings of fatherhood based on Scandinavian derived social constructionist and gender equality perspectives (de-Singly, 1993; Kiely, 1995,)

A significant conclusion is that governmental-level social policy reports regarding family support, social welfare provision and the Constitutional status quo in Ireland have drawn, often exclusively, on USA social science findings and USA social policy models. These USA research findings and social policy models have been applied during consideration of Irish social policy approaches to child-maintenance enforcement, the introduction of 'time-limited' welfare for lone-mothers and the role of 'vulnerable' fathers in residual family support strategies. In relation to Irish welfare state development, the trends towards American hegemony in Irish father politics and family support initiatives are fully in keeping with a National Economic and Social Council (2005) consensus for a residual welfare state trajectory.

An ongoing normative analytical preference for an American-type residual economic-liberal approach to welfare state development prevails in the Republic of Ireland. This now combines with a USA-derived neo-conservative approach to father politics and family support. These neo-liberal and neo-patriarchal developments reinvent a long-standing patriarchal-familist and male-breadwinning understanding of fatherhood in Ireland. Contemporary Irish social policy debates indicate the persistence of conceptual understandings of fatherhood that revolve around a peripheral 'instrumental' role for fathers rather than a caring 'expressive' role. These American derived social policy understandings of fatherhood depict an Irish crisis of masculinity and social reproduction. Against this view are the Scandinavian understandings, which resulted in generous paternal leave regimes as a practical social policy approach to the contemporary decline of male-breadwinning marriage. However, Irish social policy has consistently failed to consider the Swedish alternative. The Irish approach has been influenced largely by American approaches in that it increasingly encourages 'vulnerable' men to become better fathers through a combination of agency and therapeutic family support. A deviation from this view is the *APOCC* report recommendation to give legal rights to fathers in accordance with any constitutional amendments concerning children's rights (p.125). If implemented, this would eventually take Ireland somewhat closer towards the Swedish situation. Still, Irish social policy seems a long way from exploring the emancipatory potential of shared parental leave to improve gender equality in labour market participation or from exploring the potential of labour market de-commodification in the form of parental leave to contribute to child and father socialisation in Ireland.

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